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Articles in Today's Clips Wednesday, January 23, 2008

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<u>TOPIC</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Child Abuse/Neglect/Protection	2-6
Juvenile Justice	7-16
Health Care	17-29
Energy Assistance	30-33
Homelessness	34-37
News Release	38-39

*Important story at this spot



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Published January 23, 2008

What's next

- Jurors will continue deliberations today in the trial of Robin Terence Wood, who is charged with molesting three girls, including two who attended his wife's home day care.

Wood refutes abuse charges

Jury deliberations begin in Lansing day care case

Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

A 60-year-old man charged with molesting three girls, including two who attended his wife's home day care, took the stand Tuesday and denied touching them inappropriately.

He said he would hug them, rub their backs, put an arm around them, or even apply cream to rashes.

"I know for a fact that I never touched any of the children for sexual reasons," Robin Terence Wood said.

Jurors on Tuesday began deliberations in the trial and will continue this morning.

He faces a maximum sentence of life imprisonment if convicted.

Wood is charged with five counts of criminal sexual conduct against the children, including at least two instances of penetration with his fingers involving a girl who is now 5 years old. Prosecutors Tuesday agreed to dismiss one count of second-degree criminal sexual conduct, which also involved the girl, saying testimony had not supported the charge.

During testimony Tuesday, Wood described how "on quite a few occasions" he rubbed cream on the buttocks of his now 6-year-old great-niece, who suffered from a skin condition.

As she sat in his lap, he would put cream in his hand "and reach down into her pants and rub it on ... the affected area," Wood testified.

He said others were in the room every time.

Wood said that the last time he applied the cream, the girl asked him to stop, and he complied: "I believe her words were: 'Can we stop now?' "

When asked by his attorney, John Frawley, to describe his intent, Wood said: "It was to alleviate

discomfort."

Assistant Prosecutor Bill Crino said during closing arguments that Wood's actions were more menacing.

"This defendant was copping a feel," Crino said.

Frawley said the girls' stories had changed several times and were not reliable.

Wood also described an incident from the spring or summer of 2006. Wood said the girl woke up from a nap and complained about the rash.

After pulling down the girl's pants and underwear to apply the cream, a worker at the day care walked into the room, Wood testified.

"Sometime later ... my wife mentioned that it might look (inappropriate)," he said. "I told her that I would stop, that I understood the situation."

Officials closed down Mary Wood's Quality Day Care in south Lansing last January after parents brought complaints to the Michigan Department of Human Services.

Robin Wood was charged in February.

Wood, a General Motors Corp. retiree, testified that he began assisting in caring for children after his 2003 retirement. That care included everything from taking them on field trips to changing diapers.

Children at the day care referred to Wood as "Papa Robin."

He admitted taking a nap in a bed while some children watched television.

Wood described an incident involving a girl, now 11, who was friends with children at the day care.

He was rubbing her back, he testified, working his way down her back, and "apparently I went beyond the boundary of her pants and she said, 'Hey.' "

Wood said he immediately stopped.

"There is a glaring lack of evidence," Frawley said about the prosecution's case.

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Youth camp counselor charged in molestation

Wednesday, January 23, 2008

By Chad Livengood

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A counselor at a youth camp who also works at an after-school program at a Jackson-area charter school has been charged with molesting a then 10-year-old girl while he was baby-sitting her, authorities said.

Thomas Stanley Page, 54, of Gregory in Livingston County is employed as a part-time camp counselor by Highfields youth camp in Onondaga. Through Highfields, he also works at an after-school program at da Vinci primary school in Blackman Township.

Page was arraigned Saturday on one count of first-degree criminal sexual conduct. The alleged assault occurred four years ago in the girl's Ypsilanti Township home, said Washtenaw County Sheriff's Cmdr. Dave Egeler.

"We don't believe there would be any opportunity for that kind of thing while he was working" for Highfields, said John Evans, president of the organization, which has youth programs in Jackson and Lansing.

Page has worked for Highfields' after-school program at da Vinci since September 2004. He has been suspended without pay until further information becomes available, Evans said.

"This is a surprise to us, too," Evans said Tuesday. "He's not with us, pending more information."

Evans said Page was an instructor for the camp's low-ropes course. During all Highfields activities, no child is left alone with an adult, Evans said.

"We look after the kids' safety first and foremost," Evans said.

Evans also said Page has maintained a good job performance and passed criminal background and state Department of Human Services Central Registry checks.

Da Vinci administrators confirmed Page worked in the building for the last three years, but had no further comment. Superintendent Donald Tassie, who was chaperoning an out-of-state student trip, could not be reached for comment.

Page was acquainted with the girl's family for five years and frequently baby-sat her at the family home, Egeler said.

The investigation began about a month ago after the girl, now 14, told a school counselor in Livonia, where she now lives, Egeler said.

Page remained in the Washtenaw County Jail on Tuesday, held on a \$50,000 cash bond. He faces up to life in prison if convicted of first-degree criminal sexual conduct.

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The real victims

EDITOR:

I'm making things more honest by working to finish law school, and making things better for other taxpayers out there.

Let me speak of those out there, such as Michigan's government, and Social Service departments who take away taxpayers' children.

Any individual knows that there are those who just have to make complaints against those who are trying to raise their children right.

When children sometimes get mad for being removed from their biological homes and families, they sometimes cry out in their own ways and sometimes accuse others of things to get attention.

The DSS, otherwise known as Social Services, or the Family Independence, whichever it is, they investigate children being abused, and so on.

These types of organizations should look into things before they jump the gun, and remove children from innocent people's homes and from the biological parents.

In many cases, we have in fact found, such as one in particular, the child is removed from the home and has no say where they wish to lodge.

Then one day, the foster parents and a friend approach the police and make an accusation of let's say, rape, for instance.

When the polygraph comes along, and the person accused passes with flying colors, who pays for these investigations? The taxpayer, that's who.

It seems to me that the people who are in charge at the time of the child's well being, should have to pay for the wasted time of our enforcers, and the Social Services should be held responsible for reimbursements as well.

They remove children from those who hurt people, and they, the Social Service departments, DSS, and FIA, whichever they call it now it has been changed so many times, should. However, the falsely accused are really at risk here, and are in fact the real victims of their injustices.

Then there is another department who tells a totally blind man that his wife has to move out, and that he is not allowed to live with his wife and children because he was falsely accused in McComb County in the Lower Peninsula of Michigan.

Is there some kind of epidemic throughout the state of Michigan to collect federal funds to pay for foster care and or adoption proceedings?

We have found just in this area alone, is one of the highest in the state and it is spreading. Michigan is the highest state in the union for having children removed from their homes and taken away from their biological families at the cost of us hard working taxpayers, herein.

When things go to court, you cannot use evidence that is most crucial. So how do you prove your innocence without being able to use your evidence?

Prosecutors make deals and force people to do as they wish because they catch people off guard and know these people do not know the laws like some do, and these people are confused and agree to things they are not really sure of, and when this takes place, they are trapped in what we call an unjust legal system.

In the long run, courts use the rape laws in their old context, instead of them staying up to date on the ways these laws are actually written, and the ways these laws are really meant to be. We all need a change for a much better system and for a much more honest one, as well as much better and more honest department participation when in fact these issues occur.

In the long run, the children, and the accused, are in fact the real victims. They believe their parents and other relatives do not care about them. They are told these things by these departments.

They also grow up to be miserable, unhappy with anger, professionals say.

Some learn to lie, cheat, and end up in prisons across our country. Most are taught this by DSS, FIA, and even investigators and prosecutors in many cases.

These types of situations and circumstances have to be resolved.

May God bless each and everyone, and may they all produce the happiest new year of all.

Mark Showinsky

Kingsford



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Published January 23, 2008

Free on bond

- Jarod Anthony Marshall was released on bond Tuesday. He is charged as an adult in the Jan. 8 beating of a Leslie High School student.

Leslie student released on bond

15-year-old boy charged with beating girl, 14

Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

LESLIE - A 15-year-old boy charged with severely beating a Leslie High School student earlier this month was released on bond Tuesday, over the objection of prosecutors.

Jarod Anthony Marshall, of Leslie, was released on a \$125,000 bond personal recognizance bond, said Ingham County Prosecutor Stuart Dunnings III.

He said his office will ask the judge for an immediate reconsideration.

The case is in 55th District Court before Judge Thomas Boyd, Dunnings said.

"We're going to try to deal with this as expeditiously as possible," he said Tuesday evening.

Authorities say that on the morning of Jan. 8, Marshall attacked 14-year-old Mary Pulliam as she was walking along a path between Leslie Middle School and the high school.

Pulliam was found unconscious by a classmate. She was rushed to Sparrow Hospital in Lansing where doctors used 15 staples to close the cuts on her head, her father said.

Pulliam's family is outraged, said her uncle, Terry Hill.

"This is a dangerous kid," Hill said.

"He just snapped almost two weeks ago and almost killed Mary."

Marshall, described in court documents as 6-feet-2-inches tall and 230 pounds, is charged as an adult with assault with intent to murder.

He faces up to life in prison.

Attempts to reach Marshall and his family were unsuccessful Tuesday night.

Pulliam, who suffered facial and skull fractures, as well as liver and lung contusions, remains hospitalized.

"She probably will be there another week," Hill said. "She can't walk straight - you have to hold her up. She can't keep her thoughts straight," he added.

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Give juvenile lifers a chance at parole

January 23, 2008

Michigan's notorious juvenile lifer law has drawn fire from human rights groups worldwide -- and rightly so. The law has forced judges to give kids as young as 14 -- an age when they cannot legally drive or buy cigarettes -- the maximum adult penalty of life-no parole in first-degree murder cases.

More than 300 Michigan juveniles are serving such sentences, some for aiding and abetting the crime. This law needs revision.

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A bill, introduced by state Rep. Paul Condino, D-Southfield, would not, in itself, release any juvenile lifer from prison, but it would at least give them a chance at parole. Some have already served decades. Condino's bill would also prohibit giving juveniles the maximum adult penalty.

The House Judiciary Committee, which Condino chairs, will consider the bill today.

The law as it stands contradicts science, common sense, public opinion and longstanding legal tradition, which weighs maturity and competence in assessing legal culpability.

Brain imaging research proves the obvious: Teenagers are more impulsive and unstable than adults, even without the abuse and neglect that many young offenders have experienced.

Juveniles don't have the same legal rights and responsibilities as adults because they lack the maturity and judgment to handle them. Nor should they generally pay the same consequences for crimes. That's partly why a conservative U.S. Supreme Court threw out the death penalty for juveniles. A Wayne State University survey in 2006 suggested that only 5% of state residents support the current Michigan law.

Michigan's juvenile lifer law is out of step with standards of human rights and decency. Legislators should change this unforgiving system.

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Young killers could get new chance at freedom

January 23, 2008

Michigan's teenage killers serving life sentences with no chance of parole would be given a chance to regain their freedom under legislation set for consideration in a state House committee today.

The legislation would scale back one of the key measures enacted in the 1980s to deal with public fear over a rise in violent crime committed by young people.

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House Judiciary Committee Chairman Paul Condino, D-Southfield, said Tuesday that it is "sad and tragic" that juvenile criminals are being locked up for life, with no chance of rehabilitation or the opportunity to contribute to society.

The legislation would make juveniles who were tried as adults and convicted of first-degree murder eligible for parole consideration. One bill also would grant similar opportunity for those convicted of life-without-parole offenses at 17.

Among the backers are the ACLU, the Michigan Catholic Conference and juvenile-rights activists who complain that treatment of juvenile criminals in Michigan in particular violates international standards.

But the measure faces long odds for approval because of opposition from law enforcement agencies and advocates for victims' rights.

By Dawson Bell

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Wednesday, January 23, 2008

Panel to study kids' prison terms

House committee to re-examine whether juveniles should get life sentences without parole.

Charlie Cain / Detroit News Lansing Bureau

LANSING -- Should Michigan courts automatically sentence some juvenile offenders to life prison terms without the possibility of parole -- or is that excessively harsh punishment for kids?

That's the topic slated for debate today before the House Judiciary Committee. The American Civil Liberties Union has been trying for five years to convince lawmakers that some young criminals deserve a second chance, and that judges should have broader authority to mete out punishment to teens.

"We are encouraged (the committee) has decided to re-examine sentencing laws that treat children in this state so harshly," Michigan ACLU Executive Director Kary Moss said in a statement.

"Judges should be allowed to use their best judgment in deciding what type of punishment best fits the crime," she added. "Unfortunately, that is not the case in Michigan and the result is that over 300 people have been sentenced as teenagers to life without parole."

The group finds it particularly offensive that Michigan law requires judges to hand out a life without parole sentence in cases of "felony murder" even if the youthful offender was only present at the crime scene but did not personally do the killing.

Lawmakers are taking a keener than usual look this year at prison spending, which has climbed to more than \$2 billion a year, or more than the state spends on higher education. Michigan spends far more than its surrounding states on prisons and yet Michigan's crime rate is comparable to its neighbors'.

The budget is expected to be tight again this year. Gov. Jennifer Granholm is expected to propose cost-saving recommendations for reforms in state corrections policies next month, when she outlines her budget recommendations for the fiscal year starting Oct. 1.

But some lawmakers argue that prison costs are only part of the equation and that society has a right to expect protection from violent predators, regardless of their age.

The ACLU cites a number of cases it says justifies taking another look at sentencing guidelines, including that of Henry Hill, who was 16-years-old when he was involved in a shooting between two groups of Saginaw boys. One died.

Testimony established that Hill did not pull a trigger, the ACLU says. Hill has been locked up nearly 30 years and will die there unless the laws are changed.

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How teen runaways were caught

Teens, their parents are to head home today

January 23, 2008

BY BEN SCHMITT and GINA DAMRON

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS

After being caught near a Louisiana beach Monday with her boyfriend, teen runaway Hannah McConnell spilled details of her cross-country adventure to the person she's closest to: her grandma.

The 13-year-old, who sneaked out of her Vienna Township home on Jan. 12 and into a van with 15-year-old Gage Petherbridge, called her grandmother Sherry Baker from the Cameron Parish Sheriff's Office in Louisiana.

Advertisement

"I was so shocked when" the recorded message "said, 'You have a collect call from Hannah,' and her little voice came on the phone," Baker said Tuesday, as Hannah's and Gage's parents traveled to Louisiana to retrieve their children.

Gage, also of Vienna Township, and Hannah are expected to return to Michigan today. The television news program "Inside Edition" accompanied both teens' families to film the reunion, family members said. The couple received national news coverage of their flight -- which included Gage's cocker spaniel, Mandy.

Driving from Baton Rouge to the sheriff's office in Cameron Parish, Gage's family had "kind of mixed emotions, wondering how they're going to feel," the boy's stepfather, Duane Wismer, said Tuesday night. "We're hoping for a big happy reunion."

The teens, who ran off after their parents told them to stop contacting each other, had planned to go to Ohio, Baker said, but Hannah decided she wanted to go to Chicago, where she had visited before with her grandmother.

There, the couple got lost in a bad neighborhood and decided to move on.

"The next thing they knew, they were in Iowa," Baker said. "Then they started heading south."

They drove through Missouri, Arkansas and into Texas, where they landed in Port Arthur.

Sunday night they slept in the white Pontiac minivan Gage had stolen from his parents. On Monday, Gage and Hannah wanted to go the beach, to see the ocean. They ended up on Holly Beach in Louisiana.

Around noon Monday, when the teens walked into Jep's Island Emporium, a small grocery, gas and RV park complex on Pleasure Island, near Port Arthur, they were calm and talkative, said Katrina Gonzalez, a cashier.

They shopped, used the bathroom and milled around outside with Mandy. Around noon, a Frito-Lay deliveryman came into the store and whispered to Gonzalez to call the police.

"He said he recognized them from the news," she said. "I thought he was joking. But he said he had seen their parents crying on the news."

How teen runaways were caught

Gonzalez made the call. The Port Arthur police told them to stall the teens.

"I asked them where they were coming from, where they were going," she said. "The girl said they were just on a road trip. I asked her how old she was and she started to get nervous."

The teens left. Gonzalez said she convinced another customer to ask them to help pump their gas. But they had already taken off. The cops arrived about five minutes later.

Ralph Odom, a 911 supervisor for the Port Arthur police, said he radioed ahead to Cameron Parish, La., that the kids were headed that way. It was 12:41 p.m.

After the teens were spotted by workers in an ambulance center on Holly Beach, La., deputies with the Cameron Parish Sheriff's Office pulled them over nearly two hours later, traveling west on Highway 82, back toward Texas, said Cameron Parish Sheriff's Chief Deputy Ron Johnson.

Their parents traveled throughout the day Tuesday, an "Inside Edition" camera crew in tow. The program paid for the parents' flights, hotel rooms and a limousine to take them to the airport Tuesday morning, said Veronica McConnell, 27, Hannah's sister.

"Inside Edition," Wismer said, told the families not to talk to other media outlets. Officials at the show did not return calls to the Free Press about such an arrangement.

The families accepted the offer, McConnell said, because the total cost of the trip would have exceeded \$2,000 for each family. Hannah's parents, John and Julie McConnell, and Gage's mom and stepdad, Mary and Duane Wismer, traveled together.

Gage and Hannah are being held in isolated cells at the sheriff's office. They can't see each other, but can hear each other's voices.

"You see them bending down at the doors and contacting each other," Johnson said.

Julie McConnell has said her daughter was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and tried to commit suicide in November after her parents told her they didn't want her seeing Gage anymore. Since she was caught, Hannah has called her grandma a few times.

"She does kind of sound a little down and depressed. Who wouldn't be?" Baker said. "She sounds like a little lost puppy."

The teens' parents had a chance to talk with each other throughout the day Tuesday, but are still unsure how they'll handle the situation once they get home, Wismer said.

"Obviously, they're still going to love each other," he said. "You can't just pull the switch and say, 'You can't love her, she can't love you anymore.' We've got some work to do."

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Wednesday, January 23, 2008

Parents, teens who ran away reunite in La.

Francis X. Donnelly / The Detroit News

In tiny Cameron, La., the only building that survived two hurricanes is the parish courthouse, a Depression-era structure of steel and concrete.

So it's only fitting that the building will mark the end of a storm of a different sort, one that began in Michigan nine days earlier.

The parents of two love-struck teens, who ran away from their Flint-area homes Jan. 12 after the adults tried to end the relationship, arrived Tuesday night to bring their children home.

The teens were picked up around 7 p.m. Tuesday, said Deputy Walter Soileau of the Cameron Parish Sheriff's office.

"They were ready to go back," Soileau said. "They were kind of excited to see their parents again."

Gage, 15, and Hannah McConnell, 13, were nabbed by police Monday shortly after frolicking along the shores of the Gulf of Mexico in nearby Holly Beach, La.

"It's a happy ending," Duane Wismer, stepfather of Gage Petherbridge, said earlier in the day.

Gage missed his family and was relieved the ordeal was over, Wismer said.

The youth didn't realize that his tribulations had turned into a national spectacle.

Law enforcement agencies in Louisiana and Michigan said they didn't think criminal charges would be filed against the youths.

"We didn't interview them past identifying them," said Ron Johnson, chief deputy of the Cameron Parish Sheriff's office.

The youths' whereabouts for the nine days still aren't known, but authorities shed some light on their last hours of freedom.

After sleeping in the minivan Sunday night, the youths were seen by a resident in a convenience store in the Texas border town of Port Arthur.

The resident called local police, who told Louisiana officials the kids were driving into their state.

Emergency medical technician Brad Lester, alerted by a dispatcher, later spotted the van in Holly Beach.

He and his partner followed the vehicle and watched the couple exit at the beach and feed seagulls.

The youths became suspicious and left the area, but were stopped by police shortly afterward.

"If it was my kids in the same situation," Lester said, "I'd want someone to do the right thing and make sure they were all right."

Detroit News Staff Writer Mark Hicks contributed to this report.

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Media attention wrong message?

GENESEE COUNTY

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, January 23, 2008

By Ken Palmer

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The saga of two runaway teens in love neared its tabloid television zenith Tuesday night as "Inside Edition" profiled the pair alongside stories on the death of a Hollywood actor and the body language of presidential candidates.

The brief segment showed 13-year-old Hannah McConnell's parents hugging at news that her daughter had been found safe in Louisiana on Monday after nine days on the run with her 15-year-old boyfriend, Gage Petherbridge.

The Vienna Township teens had been the subjects of a nationwide search before their road trip ended on a Louisiana beach near the Texas border.

During the "Inside Edition" segment, Hannah's mother, Julie, expressed relief that Hannah had not dyed her hair black or "anything crazy."

Her father, John, told the show that the ordeal has been "like watching a horror movie and your kid's in it."

Gage's mother, Mary Wismer, said she planned to tell her son "my heart has been broke since you've been gone."

The reunion with their parents is expected to be aired on tonight's "Inside Edition."

But as the media spotlight remains on the teens, some worry that the widespread attention has sent a troublesome message to others unhappy with their home life.

"It's become entertainment," said Genesee County Sheriff Robert J. Pickell. "It's not entertainment (and) it sure wasn't entertaining for the families of these kids."

There are an average of 2,000 runaways a week in Michigan, and not all of them have a happy ending, said Pickell.

A Genesee County 14-year-old girl who ran away to Cleveland was later found back in the Flint area dancing at a strip club with a fake ID she got in Ohio, he said.

While most return home in a day or two, others never are heard from again.

From the start, the tale of Gage and Hannah has had widespread appeal.

Young and in love, the pair spirited away in the night with the Petherbridge family minivan, his pet cocker spaniel, Mandy, and his Xbox 360.

They had \$580 in Gage's Christmas money and \$100 that Hannah took from her mom's purse on her way out the door. The pair expressed their love and angst on their MySpace pages.

But there was also a darker side to the story.

Hannah is bipolar and left her medication behind, causing added concern for her parents.

As word spread that Gage, Hannah and Mandy might be on their way to California, their parents found themselves besieged by producers calling from cable news outlets and talk shows.

The media attention could add another layer of complexity to the families' ordeal and cause more tension, said Dianne Dailey, owner of the Dailey Life Centers in Flint and Fenton.

"Maybe the teenagers will feel rewarded by all that," she said. "Their symptoms have gotten rewarded. Not too many kids get to have a love story that goes nationwide. It might actually help romanticize the deep love they think they have."

Dailey said the teens might need to be shielded from what could be a large outpouring of letters, e-mails or phone calls from people who relate to their plight.

And their highly publicized trek might encourage copycats, she said.

Gage and Hannah's parents could not be reached for comment Tuesday night or this morning.

Both teens should face consequences for their behavior, said Nancy Rodda, director of children's services for Genesee County Community Mental Health.

Investigators are expected to discuss the case with prosecutors and probate court officials, but Rodda said the parents also must decide how they will deal with the pair.

"This is about relationships, and the kids need to know how many people they caused to worry and how many resources were used in the community looking for them," Rodda said.

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Health care in crisis 1 in 8 lack health coverage

Uninsured often don't know how to find help

By DENISE JENKIN

Special to The Oakland Press

In addition to helping with insurance enrollment, the Oakland County Nurse On Call program refers people to a network of public and private health care services. The county Health Division offers several of its own services for the uninsured.

Immunizations are provided at cost for adults and children with no health coverage, with a wide range of prices from \$7 for a flu shot to \$360 for the most expensive series of children's vaccines. The shots are available at Oakland County health clinics in Pontiac, Southfield and Walled Lake.

The county offers child health clinics that provide well care, including physical exams and immunizations, for children not enrolled in Medicaid or an HMO. Children must be enrolled by 2 years old.

The county's Children's Special Health Care Services provides help to families of children with chronic health problems or disabilities. The program helps pay for special medical care needs, supplies and equipment and provides referrals to other resources.

In the county clinics, anonymous HIV counseling and testing is offered, as well as pregnancy education and testing, sexually transmitted disease diagnosis and treatment, and tuberculosis testing, treatment and referral services.

An Oakland County drug discount card is available to any resident without prescription drug coverage, as well, Dickerson said.

The goal of the network of services is to reach individuals and families before their health needs become critical.

"We are trying to reach them before it reaches the point that they are headed to the emergency room," Miller said. "At that point, they are usually more sick and have

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Health care in crisis Hospitals share burden of cost

By DENISE JENKIN
Special to The Oakland Press

Annie Broughton was paralyzed with stomach pain when a friend offered to take her to the emergency room.

"I told her 'I've got so many bills, I can't afford to go to the emergency room,'" said Broughton, 60.

About five minutes later, Broughton fainted, and her friend had no choice but to take her to the nearest hospital. By the next morning, Broughton had undergone gall bladder surgery and learned gallstones had caused her pain.

Just as her pain was receding, Broughton was relieved to learn that the Mercy Place support program would cover the cost of her hospital stay.

The program, offered through St. Joseph Mercy-Oakland in Pontiac, helps patients who have no other means to pay for their health care.

The Mercy Place program, which started in the back rooms of St. Vincent de Paul Church in Pontiac nearly 27 years ago, is a shining example of the community outreach programs offered by local hospitals to help the uninsured.

Employed part-time but still uninsured, Broughton is one of more than 1 million Michigan residents who don't have health insurance. Most don't realize that many hospitals have staff members whose jobs are devoted to helping those who can't pay for their health care.

Oakland County hospitals offer community clinics and other programs to get health care to the uninsured before they end up in the emergency room. But even after the bills have been accrued, hospitals have financial counselors dedicated to helping patients with the overwhelming bills. They have the capacity to write off portions of bills on a sliding scale, depending on financial requirements set by each individual hospital.

"The biggest problem is getting people of need to access health care early," said Jack Weiner, president and chief executive officer of St. Joseph Mercy-Oakland in Pontiac. "People don't understand the impact of diabetes. They don't understand that there is something going on that can kill them. "Our problem is getting them to understand there is a problem. We don't want to see them in the emergency room when their limb is actually in jeopardy."

However, the vast majority of health care for the uninsured still starts in the

emergency room, when patients have put off a health care problem until it's become critical.

Broughton's surgery was 10 years ago, and she doesn't worry about her health care any more. She sees Dr. Steven Bolton at the Mercy Place clinic in Pontiac at least four times a year to monitor her high blood pressure and other health conditions -- all without paying a dime. She takes up to nine medications a month and pays only \$3 for each, and she wears glasses with donated frames, all programs provided through Mercy Place.

Broughton, of Pontiac, works 20 hours a week and doesn't qualify for health insurance. She's too young for Medicare and doesn't qualify for state-run Medicaid. Prior to getting her job this year, she worked full-time taking care of her adult son, who had a disabling severe head injury. Because of his disability, he qualified for government-sponsored health insurance, but Broughton was on her own.

Her experience exemplifies Mercy Place's two goals, both primary health care and education. Because Broughton is able to monitor her blood pressure and glaucoma, she is keeping the chronic ailments in check before they lead to disaster. She can call the center at any time, with illnesses from arthritis to the flu.

"I love seeing Dr. Bolton," she said. "He don't try to rush you out of the room because you don't have insurance. They take the time to treat you like a human being."

John Graham, chief executive officer at North Oakland Medical Centers in Pontiac, said that while their hospital does its best to reach out to people in the community before they need an emergency room, once they get there, every patient is treated the same way.

"Literally, the physicians and the staff who are caring for the patient do not know if they have insurance or not," Graham said. "We have made arrangements with specialist physicians to provide on-call coverage for the emergency room. The hospital incurs the cost for arranging for the on-call coverage."

"If they need surgery, diagnostic tests, including admission, the hospital arranges for that. We also try to coordinate follow-up care through clinics or the physicians who provided their care in the hospital. All of us play a role and bear a part of the financial burden."

NOMC reaches out to the community in a variety of ways, including a free family health care clinic in the hospital and teen health centers at both Pontiac high schools. When uninsured patients arrive at the hospital, a full-time representative of the state Department of Human Services assigned to the hospital to reviews information with patients to find all assistance programs they may qualify for, from Medicaid to food stamps.

All hospitals in Oakland County offer similar charity care programs, dedicating from 7 to 10 percent of their annual budgets to care for the needy. To tap into that care, patients need only to contact their hospital, preferably before their need becomes so great that they must be hospitalized or rushed to the emergency room.

"There is nothing worse than being sick and then being hounded by a bill collector to pay for it," said Nick Vitale, vice president of financial operations for Beaumont hospitals.

"When the patient registers in our emergency room, once we identify they don't have insurance, we assist them in applying for Medicaid and let them know about our charity care programs."

For any uninsured patient, the hospitals discount their services by 40 percent, and low-income patients may apply for an additional discount on a sliding scale that may include 100 percent free care.

Few diagnoses require expensive, long-running care as cancer. Patients facing cancer also may bear the hefty burden of radiation, chemotherapy and even bone marrow transplants, said Kelly Vroom, executive director of patient financial services at the Karmanos Cancer Institute.

"We have a staff of financial counselors that determine if patients are uninsured or underinsured as their procedures are scheduled," Vroom said.

Patients in need are not just uninsured, but also may have high deductibles or may even lose their coverage in the midst of their cancer treatment.

"We have a sliding scale anywhere from 20 percent to 100 percent depending on a patient's eligibility," Vroom said.

The hospital's social services department also accepts donations of major medical equipment and distributes them to patients in need. Some home health care equipment for cancer patients runs in the thousands of dollars, she said.

Karmanos works with the state and federal government to provide the Breast and Cervical Cancer Control Program in Southfield. The BCCCP program, established by the federal government in 1992, offers help with similar centers across the state.

Established for low-income women ages 40 to 64, the Karmanos program provided free breast and cervical cancer screening for about 6,000 local women last year, said Dr. Robert Burack, physician manager of the BCCCP at Karmanos. More importantly, for the 2 percent of women who are diagnosed with cancer, the program provides for their treatment as well.

"Women are sensitive to the issue that treatment will be available if they go through screening," Burack said. "Screening without follow-up treatment is not going to benefit anyone."

Prior to the BCCCP and similar programs, patients depended on "the goodwill and resources of the community," Burack said.

Today, they know that even if they can't pay the bill, the hospital is going to be there for them.

"It has been discussed at the board of this hospital that the primary mission is that this purpose of this hospital is to provide a safety net for the community," said Graham of NOMC.

Charity care is up 60 percent in the last three years, said Weiner, of St. Joseph Mercy-Oakland.

"The reason we exist is to take care of the community," Weiner said. "You can't abandon the community and you can't abandon people."

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Health care in crisis Some public resources for health care

Here is a list of possible resources:

Oakland County Health Division Nurse On Call Program -- for referral to health care resources for uninsured and underinsured individuals, call (800) 848-5533 or (248) 858-1406.

Visit www.oakgov.com/health -- for information on all programs offered by the Oakland County Health Division.

Oakland County Health Division Clinics -- for immunizations, testing and treatment for HIV, STDs, tuberculosis, dental services, special children's services and nurse-parent partnerships, homes and school visits, counseling and education.

Located at County Service Center, 1200 N. Telegraph, Bldg 36 East, Pontiac. Call (248) 858-1305.

Other locations include:

- 27725 Greenfield Road, Southfield or call (248) 424-7046
- 1010 East West Maple, Walled Lake or call (248) 926-3361

For information about all state health assistance programs, visit the Michigan Department of Community Health at www.michigan.gov/mdch

Department of Human Services -- for enrollment in Medicaid and other state assistance programs. In Oakland County visit:

- 28 N. Saginaw, Pontiac, 48342, (248) 975-5200
- 4100 Woodward Ave, Stoneridge E, Ste. 200, Bloomfield Hills, (248) 975-4800
- 30755 Montpelier, Madison Heights, (248) 583-8700
- Also, you can visit www.michigan.gov/dhs, click on assistance programs, then choose medical services to find information on medical services such as Medicaid offered through the Michigan Department of Human Services

Visit www.mfia.state.mi.us/mars/ for the Michigan Assistance and Referral Services to explore eligibility for state programs such as food, cash, medical assistance and child care.

Medicaid -- state health insurance program for low-income adults and families, call (800) 642-3195

Healthy Kids -- MICHild -- for low-cost health insurance for Michigan children and health coverage for pregnant women and babies, call (888) 988-

6300

MIRx -- a state sponsored prescription discount program, call (888) 367-6557

Women, Infants and Children (WIC) -- provides food and essential needs for pregnant and new mothers and their children, call (800) 225-5942

Children's Special Health Care Services -- Assistance for children with disabilities or chronic illnesses that require additional health care needs, call (800) 359-3722

To learn more about children's health care coverage in general, call (877) KIDS-NOW or visit www.insurekidsnow.gov

To check for a community health clinic near you, call the Michigan Primary Care Association at (800) 752-7268

For help with free or discounted prescription drugs, try www.needymeds.com, www.rxassist.org, www.pfizer.com/helpfulanswers or call (866-706-2400), and www.merckhelps.com

Medicare -- federal health insurance for seniors and disabled individuals (888) 633-4227 (800-MEDICARE)

Veterans Assistance through the Veterans Association Benefits Service Center, call (877) 222-VETS or visit www.va.gov/health

Sources: Local community programs, Michigan Division of Community Health and covertheuninsured.org.

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Is care worse? Or state now tougher?

Posted by [Jackson Citizen Patriot](#)

January 23, 2008 08:05AM

The following is the [Jackson Citizen Patriot's](#) editorial for January 23:

Something seems quite wrong with Michigan's nursing homes. It's not the quality of residents' care, either.

Issue The state punishes three local nursing homes after recent inspections.

Our Say

This is part of what appears to be a crackdown.

The state Department of Community Health denies it, but there appears to be a crackdown on nursing homes over the last two years. The state agency is issuing about 40 percent more citations per visit than it did two years ago, according to the trade group that represents nursing homes. It closed three homes in 2005 and three more in 2006, but then shut down seven last year.

A blip in the numbers? Maybe. But as some Jackson-area nursing homes demonstrate, it looks like the state is doing its work with a heavy hand these days. Three local facilities — Vista Grande Villa, Arbor Manor Rehabilitation & Nursing Center, and the Jackson County Medical Care Facility — were denied payments for new Medicaid and Medicare patients in recent months.

That's a serious punishment, one that ought to be used only for serious wrongdoing. All three nursing homes cleared up their problems quickly. None had poor reputations. And one, Arbor Manor, had to wait a month for a follow-up inspection after it apparently corrected violations.

No one suggests state regulators should overlook problems in a health-care facility that cares for old or medically fragile people around the clock. The state helped cut off Medicaid and Medicare money to Cedar Knoll Care Center in Grass Lake last year, and that led to its closing. The events were unfortunate, but they appeared necessary for residents' well-being.

However, cutting off Medicaid and Medicare dollars without giving nursing homes a chance to correct their violations in a timely manner seems too harsh.

Community Health spokesman James McCurtis says the department's approach hasn't changed. Those in the nursing-home industry say otherwise. So do the numbers.

If state regulators have a new or different agenda, let's hear it. And let's give the nursing homes a chance to weigh in and understand that agenda. As more seniors turn to assisted living or other options, nursing homes today provide care for the most vulnerable. Perhaps they need to be held to higher standards.

The insistence that everything's simply status quo doesn't ring true, and it opens the door to all sorts of speculation. Are state officials trying to force senior-living providers out of the nursing-home market? Are they trying to save a few bucks on Medicaid payments?

Tougher enforcement comes with consequences. When homes lose Medicaid money, that affects places like Foote Hospital as they discharge patients. It affects nursing homes' profits and reputation. And it means more work for state regulators themselves. If they're going to punish a facility, they have to be sure they can perform a follow-up visit quickly after violations have been corrected.

The state should require nursing homes to provide good care. But it should work in partnership with them, not in a punitive way. And it should be open in explaining any change in policy or practice.

Cadillac Community Health Coalition highlights successes of 2007

By Mardi Suhs

CADILLAC - Two major accomplishments for the year 2007 were reported at Tuesday's meeting of the Cadillac Community Health Coalition.

"I would say our greatest accomplishments this year," explained coalition co-chair Dawn Ewald of Mercy Hospital, "would be the work site wellness initiatives in the schools and area companies. Also, our Wexford County Meth Task Force has been a great success. On Friday, we heard that meth cases in our area are way down. And I talked to police yesterday and they are amazed at the difference from last year and today."

In 2005, after health and law enforcement agencies reported that methamphetamine use was a growing problem, the coalition formed a Meth Task Force to focus on public education. Local physicians and team members attended educational seminars.

Last February, the coalition received a grant for educational materials.

"With the grant money we did presentations and we had posters that advertised a meth tip line in convenience stores," Ewald explained. "We purchased a variety of programs for professionals to use." In addition, the task force highlighted the health hazards associated with the drug.

"We talked to the Sheriff's Department and the Department of Human Services and they both said that meth use is down," Ewald reported. "This is good news for the whole community. I think because people are educated, they know what to look for."

The second area of coalition success was in promoting work site wellness initiatives in schools and area companies.

Kevin Hughes of the Health Department noted because of a Cardio Vascular Disease grant, worksite wellness programming was initiated in eight worksites.

"We are focusing on small businesses with less than 100 employees," Ewald said. "And Four Winns has been a great example. They have their own wellness program sponsored by Genmar, their parent company. They are the leaders. With their employee wellness program they have seen a reduction in smoking. They have some good hard data. And they are probably seeing an increase in productivity based on the health of the employees."

Due to coalition efforts, school wellness teams have been formed in many area schools, resulting in assessments of school nutrition and physical activity.

"Recently we talked with all the school superintendents," Ewald continued. "We are going to be measuring the heights, weights and body mass index of three different age groups to come up with data which will be used to provide future directions in wellness and exercise and health."

When the coalition meets again they will be setting goals and objectives for the year 2008.

news@cadillacnews.com | 775-NEWS (6397)

What is the Cadillac Community Health Coalition?

In 2002 a group of concerned community leaders evaluated the needs of our area by conducting an extensive Community Asset Needs Assessment survey. The survey was sponsored by Human Services, The Cadillac Area Community Foundation, and the United Way.

The results were used to develop an action plan to improve the health of our community. Over the last five years the coalition has developed many successful programs including "Let's Get Moving Cadillac," "Winter Wellness," and "

tobacco and substance abuse " preventative programs.



'Give Kids A Smile Day' to help low income kids receive dental care

GENESEE COUNTY

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, January 23, 2008

By Shantell M. Kirkendoll

skirkendoll@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6366

GENESEE COUNTY - A visit to the dentist is in store for hundreds of children without dental insurance during "Give Kids A Smile Day" on Feb. 1.

Participating dentists will take appointments to see children from low-income families for free.

"We were overwhelmed last year," said dentist Steve Sulfaro, coordinator of Give Kids A Smile, a project of the Genesee District Dental Society. "Parents were so appreciative and some were in tears because they were so concerned about their children's teeth."

About 14,000 children in Genesee County lack dental insurance.

Twenty dental offices in Flint, Fenton, Clio, Linden, Burton and Lapeer will provide cleanings, exams, X-rays, fluoride treatments and sealants. It's the fifth year the local dental society has participated in the program sponsored by the American Dental Association.

At Sulfaro's office last year, 45 children were got goodie bags and watched videos as they waited.

Dentists also are educating parents about the importance of baby teeth. Although they fall out, primary, or baby teeth, are important for chewing, speech and the spacing of permanent teeth. They can also hurt and distract children in school.

"They get diseases like adult teeth," said Sulfaro. "Baby teeth must be maintained because they provide the space and guide for adult teeth."

A long-term solution also is planned to provide dental visits for Genesee County children, said the Department of Community Health's James McCurtis Jr.

Later this year, reportedly in August, Delta Dental will be offered for the first time in urban counties, including Genesee and Saginaw.

It's an extension of the Healthy Kids Medicaid dental program and Delta tends to reimburse dentists at a better rate than Medicaid.

The help is needed, said Sue Marr, quality improvement administrator at Mott Children's Health Center, the county's largest provider of pediatric dentistry.

There's usually a waiting list at Mott to get poor children into one of their dentists. Roughly 5,600 children are seen there in six months.

"We can't do it all, nor should we," said Marr. "We'd like to expand the community's capacity and comfort

QUICK TAKE

To make an appointment

Call the offices of
Steve Sulfaro at
(248) 634-4671 or
Tom Belford at (810)
785-7500.

level for serving these children."

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State to probe power-shutoff death

Posted by [Sarita Chourey](#) | [Kalamazoo Gazette](#) January 23, 2008 08:10AM

Categories: [Breaking News](#), [Top Stories](#)

VICKSBURG -- State regulators are investigating whether American Electric Power followed proper procedures last month when it shut off the power to the home of a 90-year-old Vicksburg woman who died with pneumonia after suffering exposure, frostbite and hypothermia.

The Michigan Public Service Commission typically looks into cases on a complaint basis, but the agency decided to launch its own inquiry because of the publicity generated by the death of Phyllis Willett, spokeswoman Judy Palnau said.

"The commission is aware because of various media reports," Palnau said. "They're looking to see if it was handled correctly."

State rules regulating utilities require that customers be notified -- including a face-to-face visit -- before power is shut off. Company officials have said they mailed a notice to Willett and have a record of calling her, but they refuse to say whether anyone visited her home before her power was discontinued on Dec. 13.

A social worker on Dec. 17 discovered Willett and her 63-year-old daughter, who has a mental disability, wrapped in coats and blankets on the floor of the home. Willett died four days later while her daughter survived.

The Public Service Commission's staff has launched its own inquiry even though Willett's family has not requested an investigation, Palnau said. The inquiry could ultimately lead to a fine against the power company, Palnau said.

"We'll certainly cooperate fully in any actions or investigations undertaken by the MPSC," American Electric Power spokesman David Mayne said Tuesday.

First, the commission's staff will collect information and decide whether to open a formal case. If it does, the findings could lead to a hearing before an administrative law judge who would then send a decision to the agency's three commissioners for a final ruling.

The commission's administrative rules require a company to try at least twice to reach a customer by telephone no later than one day before the planned shutoff.

The rules, which have been approved by the Legislature, also require the company to send a representative to a home immediately before the shutoff and tell the customer the reason for the visit. If the customer can show the claim is under dispute or that it has been satisfied, the electricity will stay on.

Mayne had previously said the company notified Willett of an impending shutoff in writing on Nov. 21 and by phone on Dec. 10. But when asked this week whether a company representative had addressed Willett face-to-face prior to shutting off her electricity, Mayne said, "I'm not going to disclose any details."

The company has been conducting its own investigation into whether its employees followed notification procedures before turning off Willett's power.

Those findings will not be made public, Mayne said.

"So much of the details get into some very private matters," Mayne said. "I wouldn't look for us to make any public statements."

Shutoff chronology

- Nov. 21: American Electric Power notifies Phyllis Willett, 90, by mail that power would be cut to the Vicksburg home she shares with her mentally disabled daughter.
- Dec. 10: The utility calls Willett about the impending shutoff.
- Dec. 13: American Electric Power shuts off power at the home of Willett and her daughter, 63.
- Dec. 17: A social worker discovers Willett and her daughter, and the women are taken to Bronson Methodist Hospital.
- Dec. 18: The utility restores power to the home.
- Dec. 21: Willett dies at the hospital. A family member says she suffered from exposure, frostbite and hypothermia.



Tips can help warm home in cold temps

OTISVILLE

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, January 23, 2008

By Kristyn Peterson

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OTISVILLE - For more than two weeks ending Tuesday, Charlene Meldon warmed her home with electric heaters: Her propane tank had been empty since before Christmas.

Because of the cold temperatures, Meldon's pipes recently began to freeze, leaving her without water, too.

Meldon, who lives with her daughter and two small grandchildren, ordered 200 gallons of propane Thursday. It arrived around 2 p.m. Tuesday.

Scott Brockelmeyer, a spokesman for Ferrellgas, said the company guarantees delivery within five business days.

"This is the time of year where, understandably, it's going to take longer to get gas out," Brockelmeyer said. "It's so cold and so many people need it."

The high temperature today was

expected to be 17 degrees, according to

the WEYI (Channel 25) forecast. The

predicted high for Thursday is 16

degrees.

Extreme temperatures can lead people to use extreme tactics, such as heating with an oven or stove.

"Ovens or stoves should never, ever, be used to heat a home," said Mary Gust, spokeswoman for Consumers Energy. "Aside from the fire risk, carbon monoxide is a risk, as well."

Inexpensive heating tips include opening curtains on the south and east sides of a home while drawing the drapes on the north side, Gust said.

But if pipes begin to freeze, call a

professional, she said - don't use appliances such as hair dryers to try to fix the

problem.

For those who need more help, the Genesee County Action Resource Development, or GCARD, offers a weatherization program that focuses on lowering energy costs by replacing storm windows and doors, furnaces, hot water heaters and other heating equipment.

GCARD also offers programs to educate people about what they can do to safeguard their home against cold winters.

"At the very least, we can provide

information," said Executive Director

Steve Walker. "Hopefully, we can save someone a considerable amount of money, though."

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'A safe place to stay'

Wednesday, January 23, 2008

TAMAR RANKINS

THE SAGINAW NEWS

Doris McQueen's 7-month-old daughter, Myisha McQueen, cozily sleeps in the arms of her mother, far from the blasts of cold winter winds outside.

The Saginaw mother and daughter are residents at the Family Empowerment Center, an emergency shelter at the Saginaw Rescue Mission, 1021 Burt.

"I don't have to worry about being put out in the cold. The mission has made an impact on me and my daughter because we have a safe place to stay, and I'm learning how to become independent," McQueen said.

The homeless population is surging at shelters and a soup kitchen as winter tightens its icy grip.

The Rescue Mission's shelters for men and women with children reached capacity Monday night, filling 68 beds. The faith-based nonprofit agency keeps its doors open despite high numbers and tight space.

"We receive referrals from churches, law enforcement agencies and bus stations. We don't turn anyone away," said Kimberly Ancel, the mission's director of development. "The number will stay higher because of the cold weather. We're always prepared for whatever comes our way."

Restoration Community Outreach has had a surge in enrollment because of the frigid weather. The center at 1205 Norman in Saginaw provides shelter and support for the homeless.

The facility reached its capacity of 70 residents, forcing staff to refer people to other shelters, said Roma Thurin, executive director for Restoration Community Outreach.

"In the summertime, we average around 20 people that stay with us. Now we have to turn two to three people away a night because we're at capacity," she said. "Most of the men are coming in earlier in the day to check in because it's so cold."

The thermometer struggled to reach double-digits Saturday and Sunday, when the wind chill was 14 degrees below zero. Meteorologist Mike Cameron of Channel 5, WNEM, said temperatures now are below average but not exceptionally cold.

"Today temperatures will dip into the mid-teens for highs and single digits for lows. The record low for today is minus 13, and we are no where near that," he said.

"By Saturday, temperatures will climb to the low 30s with a light mix of snow, freezing rain and sleet. It's pretty common to have this type of cold. It's more odd not to."

McQueen and her infant have lived at the Rescue Mission since December. The 25-year-old moved into the mission as she tries to get established on her own.

"I want people to know that there are places like this," she said. "They don't have to be in the cold."

Ebanisha Moller, 25, from Waco, Texas, moved to the mission early this month after staying as a guest elsewhere didn't work out. "Staying with other people didn't work for me," she said. "I get three meals a day and warm place to sleep here (the mission). I look outside the window and see people walking and I feel bad. All my needs are met here."

Greg Francis, the men's shelter director at the Rescue Mission, said the shelter has enough essentials to

accommodate men who come to stay out the cold.

"We will put mattresses on the floor if we run out of designated bunks. We're fortunate that we have linen and bedding for men in need of shelter," he said. "I'm not surprised that the numbers are up. The cold weather brings people in. We expect it."

Pam Cole, director of the East Side Soup Kitchen, which operates out of the Hunger Solution Center at 940 E. Genesee, said her group feeds about 300 people daily.

"The cold weather, (poor) economy, lack of jobs and budget cuts have caused many people to come in," she said. "There are many people who thought they would never have to come to a soup kitchen, and now they have to." v

Tamar Rankins is a staff writer at The Saginaw News. You may reach her at 776-9724.

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01/22/2008

Huron County Homeless Coalition fund established

The Huron Daily Tribune

Food and shelter are basic needs most of us take for granted. For those who are not sure where they will lay their head each night, or resort to living in tents when Old Man Winter blows in sub-zero wind chill temperatures, basic shelter is not assumed.

The Huron County Homeless Coalition has established an endowment fund with the Huron County Community Foundation to make sure the needs of the homeless are never neglected.

Kathie Harrison, chairperson of the Huron County Homeless Coalition, said that donations were received from three sources to establish the fund. The Eastern Huron County Crop Walk, the Fraser Presbyterian Church and Erik Lundy provided the seed money for the fund. The goal is to eventually build the fund to \$200,000, so that there is always money to assist the coalition in securing shelter for those in need. Money in the fund is invested and only interest is used to make grants annually.

The Homeless Coalition has received 113 calls for assistance between Oct. 1, 2006 and Sept. 30, 2007. The 113 calls involved 215 people: 48 individuals; 12 couples without children; 27 couples and a cumulative total of 44 children and 26 single parents with a cumulative total of 46 children.

“The greatest majority of the homeless we serve are working families,” Harrison said. “We only help those who have the potential to continue to afford their housing after our assistance.”

The people assisted by the Huron County Homeless Coalition are in temporary situations.

“We had one family where a family member had a life-threatening illness that required the bread winner to be off of work for several months,” Harrison said. “We were able to assist the family one time to help them get

back on track and prevent them from going into foreclosure or eviction.

“It's a kind, just and cost effective way to help people by maintaining their housing,” Harrison added. “It's best for families.”

The HCCF invests the money and only interest is used annually off the fund, thereby ensuring that the fund will remain perpetual, for good for ever, for the betterment of the community.

“The HCCF is a vehicle for assisting the needs of the community,” said Debbie Oglenski, executive director of the HCCF. “We are happy that we could be of assistance in helping the Huron County Homeless Coalition as they provide needed resources for reaching out to the homeless of our area. It is troubling to know that there are citizens among us who have to resort to living in a car or tent without heat or running water.

“As the Huron County Homeless Coalition Endowed Fund grows, I hope someday we can say that no one in our county will have to go without basic food and shelter,” Oglenski added.

To make a donation to the Huron County Homeless Coalition Endowed Fund, make checks payable to the Huron County Community Foundation with a memo for this fund.

Contributions to the endowment for the Homeless Coalition Fund may be sent to the Huron County Community Foundation, 1160 South Van Dyke, Bad Axe, MI 48413-9615. In the check memo designate the fund for which the money is to be deposited.

For more information about the HCCF, contact Debbie or Amy at (989) 269-2850.

Contact: Maureen Sorbet or Colleen Steinman (517) 373-7394

Parents find more than \$450,000 in collected child support

Jan 23, 2008

Jan. 23, 2008

Parents struggling to make ends meet have found more than \$450,000 in unclaimed child support since March 2007 by searching the Department of Human Services online databases.

The DHS Office of Child Support offers access to a searchable database of child support funds collected and owed to custodial parents as part of its Web site. Anyone who receives or pays child support can search for unclaimed funds by entering a name and the last four digits of a social security number. Funds are unclaimed most often when parents move and fail to notify the friend of the court of the new address.

"We dedicate staff to finding individuals who have the largest amounts of unclaimed funds owed but we haven't located everyone," said Marilyn Stephen, director of the Office of Child Support. "This simple tool allows parents to search for a match themselves. In 2007, using all tools and resources available, the Office of Child Support and the friends of the court distributed more than \$3 million in unclaimed funds."

The Web site is just a part of the child support program strategy to get children the funds they are owed. Just before the holiday season, the Office of Child Support sent more than \$183,000 to one family after locating a monetary asset owned by the parent who owed child support. Another parent used the searchable Web site and located more than \$36,000.

Since the Web site was made available, 940 parents have found funds owed to them.

"Distributing child support is one of the best ways that government can keep children out of poverty," DHS Director Ismael Ahmed said. "We do everything we can to make sure families get the child support owed to them."

For additional information on the Michigan child support program go to www.michigan.gov/childsupport (http://www.michigan.gov/dhs/0,1607,7-124-5453_5528---,00.html) or www.michigan.gov/dhs (<http://www.michigan.gov/dhs>